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I appreciate the opportunity to speak to all of you at the beginning of a new academic year. After a difficult period, are we basking finally in the light at the end of a long tunnel of darkness? If not, there is certainly a little more light in this part of the tunnel than in the section we have just traversed. Budgets are not ample, or even in some cases adequate, but that matter takes on a degree of relativity after what we have had recently. There are some positive signs, and we should enjoy them.

We have reorganized our academic structure. Already we can ascertain some benefits despite the lingering, legitimate regret that some feel about the changes. There is no doubt that those interested in higher education outside our GVSC community have a better understanding of and feel more comfortable with what we are now. The faculty and staff who worked with energy, tempered by concern and restraint, to effect the changes displayed more harmony than one expects in such an academic transaction. I believe the common good was served, a state that human beings in negotiation with one another do not always or even frequently achieve. I congratulate
Professors and administrators alike who have contributed to their own and the institution’s well-being in the redesign. I know that too much was given up by too many for a sense of euphoria to prevail, but as we strike out toward reaching the objectives we have newly set for ourselves, we do so with quiet pride, knowing that we have come to reasonable conclusions about those objectives and the organization of our college.

I doubt if people in many colleges could have achieved such far-reaching changes with so little rancor. It is a triumph of reason which in its advanced state carries with it an understanding that deep feelings and commitments must be held in respect even when unsatisfied.

I serve a growing pride within our community, a belief that GVSC is a good academic institution and improving. Perhaps my sensitivity is only my wishful thought. Wishful or not, I know that in reality it must be there for us to amount to what we want to be. If I am correct, I can be confident that whatever the obstacles, we will during this year infuse our old, our restructured, and our new programs with the best of our intellect and the tempered
zeal that comes when one is professionally confident and enthusiastic about what is being done.

This fall we have a substantial increase in the number of credit hours taught. The figure has risen from 62,000 to 71,000, a 13% increase in one year. The number of students enrolled is 6,678 compared to 6,177 last fall, an increase of 8%. Certainly this is counter to the trend, happened even though we continued the higher level of admissions policies set in place last year, and makes us all feel good. There is no doubt in my mind that new programs and a multi-purpose field house, standing and used, contributed to student interest in our college. That being said, we look carefully and happily at the work of the admissions department. The new systems and personal contacts made by effective people carry the plot in a successful story. An important part of that story was the request by members of the admissions department for faculty assistance the helpful faculty response.

In one instance reported to me a member of our faculty called a prospective student, the father answered indicating that his daughter was not home, a long and friendly conversation ensued
between the professor and father. The father appreciated the discussion, the daughter, though not at home, appreciated the call. Her decision to attend Grand Valley was reinforced, of course, by her father. Such personal interest was repeated by many on the faculty, and builds the kind of relationships that generate the interest in our college that brings students, and, we hope, encourages them in their pursuit of learning.

We enter the year buoyed by the increase in enrollment and satisfied that we accomplished the tasks we assigned ourselves to prepare for this fall. The healthy state of our college will, I believe, provide the stamina to cope with unusual times, volatile conditions, and the consequences of competition not always just, though often made to seem justified.

This summer I attempted to keep you informed about our strivings to build a center downtown. These proposed buildings do not represent the fanciful whim of educators bent on using public money to provide more than is needed. They will house the ways and means for the people of Grand Rapids and vicinity to find and insure a better future for themselves. We have nearly 4,000 registrations in
courses offered in Grand Rapids. Yet we do not have the laboratories and computer terminals that can be provided only in a permanent home.

The people of this dynamic area will require research, courses, and access to all kinds of expertise to make themselves generators of a strong economy, to prepare themselves to think critically and in depth in an age when intelligent thinking will become more important to individual, group and corporate survival.

The cost is the concern. Somehow we must explain three factors satisfactorily - three factors that persuade me to pursue our goal. First, that the cost to the economy, hence to all elements of life, will be greater in the deterioration of peoples’ ability to cope with the new technologies if numerous and high quality opportunities to learn are not provided. That these opportunities are essential particularly for people engaged in small businesses that cannot afford their own education in-house, business that in total creates a high percentage of jobs for our area.

Second, that educators do reduce costs when and where they can. All is not add on. We have proven ourselves to be fiscally
responsible at Grand Valley. The measure of our responsibility is not elimination of spending, but spending for that which is most important for the learning of our students, the values of our society, and the strength of our economy.

Third, that the people of this area deserve to have some of their state tax dollars returned to them to help insure their future. Some have the naive perception that all proposed state projects within their purview that remain unfunded save tax dollars. Unfortunately for them, the dollars are spent beyond their purview by people not so naive, and they fail to receive their share. I believe in fiscal responsibility by government. This means control of taxes and spending. It does not mean the end of taxes. The tax dollars must be put to work in a partnership between private enterprise and the state. The taxes from the state must give people of all regions a chance to make themselves useful for the enterprises in which they are engaged and prepare them for new ones. By providing research, courses, consultations, and conferences, Grand Valley becomes an avenue for tax dollars to do their work in
partnership with the economic, cultural, and social enterprises of our area. A downtown center is the bricks and mortar part of the process.

The vision held by some appears to others as only unwarranted ambition. Vision must ultimately measure up to all the tests of reason if it is to warrant further development and become a more permanent reality. The program we want for the citizens, the taxpayers, and the downtown center which is important to its implementation, I believe, passes those tests. It will help the economy, it will bring our program closer to Grand Rapids Junior College, and in cooperation we will provide a more unified and accessible education, it will make available to social, cultural and health organizations services they need at close proximity, it will share and enhance property, thus in concert with private developers bring people to the city in such a way that local tax revenues will be increased. This is more than a vision, more than a dream, it is common sense for the future. If people can understand the common sense, they may also capture the dream and make it thrive as well. That is what we must hope and look for this year.
At the beginning of the year I want to share what I believe is a reasonable set of objectives for our academic community to accomplish between September and June. They are not sacred. I recognize they come from my perceptions, and additions and subtractions to them should be debated and considered. I have treated the Downtown Center separately because it has been an objective for a long time and will require effort over several years undetermined in number, though we hope no more than five before completion. What I present to you now we can do much to accomplish in one year.

1) An essential item on our agenda is for each person to so acclimate herself or himself to the new academic structure that everyone begins to find comfortable, sensible working relationships. From those relationships will come professional stimulation and the concomitant improvement in program development, teaching and scholarship. Some of you find yourself in a far different setting from last year. Such changes encompass the possibility for new enthusiasm and good ideas. These opportunities, if seized upon, will reinvigorate individuals and thus add vigor to the whole
institution. Most of all we must tune ourselves and the structure into a college that works so that all of us may have confidence in it. Open sharing of opinions and ideas, willingness to debate without personal animosity, and finally the ability to reach a decision that all can accept is the formula for success in this undertaking.

2) Many of us who committed ourselves in college and graduate school to teaching and research in some field in the humanities cheered Dr. Kirk's address at the opening Convocation. In the recent period our majors are fewer and students do not turn to us in the same numbers. We feel battered by the technological and so-called practical. What Russell Kirk said must be said. There was wisdom in his words, and the dimension that he so ably represents should loom larger than it does in our age of technology. I say this in preface to advocating a role for our institution in the business and technology of our west Michigan area. I find no incompatibility, but I have recognized for myself the necessity of technological and economic development along with a strong emphasis in the humanitarian and social fields.

Without a sound economy, one that has respectable jobs for
people and produces resources that can be widely spread about for good purposes, there will be a decline in support for civilizing influences. Much of what we in our academic setting believe in with some strength of feeling depends on the kind of economy I described. If that is true, and of course I believe it is, it makes sense for us to mobilize some of the resources we have to assist in making the economy stronger when it shows symptoms of decline. There is no doubt that Michigan should keep the automobile industry as strong as possible, but not be lulled into once again depending on it primarily to sustain an economy that will sustain what we cherish.

Since last spring Dean DeVries and I have visited people in west Michigan who manage or represent those enterprises of varying size that provide much of the employment for our area. Their needs were varied, but there definitely were needs. We saw an opportunity to create a Center for Economic Expansion and Job Creation where many of our resources and some from outside our college could be made available to business, industry, government and social organizations. Through such a center we can play a more effective
part in the economy of west Michigan, an ideal move because it will help us as we help others. Through the legislature, the executive branch, federal grants, and mostly contracted services, such a center has the possibility of thriving.

3) We are approaching the 25th anniversary of Grand Valley’s charter year. Our institution is not encased in the protective cover of tradition that at times and in places of academic weakness hides it from the public and even its prospective students who can be bamboozled by flying flags, loud trumpets, and the sage invoking of sacred cliches from the post. Yet, we are nearly 25. We should take note, make the fact count for something. The horns of a tradition are beginning to break through. With ease and justification we lose ourselves in daily, monthly, even yearly tasks related to our specific responsibilities. Out of this commitment comes good quality of academic life. Still, this year as we strive to make our new alignments work, I urge that we take on a broader task. The ethos of an institution comes from its soul. As a person matures, so does her character and the ethos about her becomes
discernible and more pronounced - so it is with a college. Our ethos should flow from the sum of all our commitments to the life of the mind. To define it is not always simple, but it is there to be recognized. It is created by what we are and what we do. As we plan to celebrate our first 25 years, I think we should consider what we do that gives us our ethos, and what we might do to enhance it. I realize that the claim of any available resources for equipment, books, and positions may be top priority when we examine our dollars. Yet, do we bring in enough scholars from outside? Certainly we have not traveled to places we should these past lean years. What kind of academic atmosphere do we want for our students and for ourselves? This broad question deserves our attention. I will ask soon that the faculty address it with me.

4) As pleased as we are with the work in admissions, our smiles pass when we observe the attrition. We addressed a problem in admissions and the solution applied has worked well. The problem of attrition, I think, is more complex, and even a modest reduction will require a more complex solution involving the positive efforts of even more people. Social life, dormitory life, transportation,
personal relationships, academic and personal counselling, financial aid, scheduling, costs, along with many other factors, I’m sure, figure in the attrition equation. Steps have been taken to make improvements in several areas. We hope they will nudge us toward lower attrition rates. We will observe and learn. Nonetheless, we should not wait for the results of what we are trying now. We must examine and analyze in greater depth, and make more plans. I will ask the Provost to recommend a process where all of us who should be will involve ourselves to reduce attrition. I always come away from consideration of this difficulty thinking its solution lies more in the human than academic realm.

5) Once again, the institution will respond to the work of a commission on the future of higher education in the state. The Commission’s work will begin soon. By March the Governor hopes the Commissioners will complete their work so their recommendations can be considered before appropriation bills are written. For a new governor to ask for such a commission is reasonable, and under the circumstances probably in the best interests of the state. My view is that the state’s higher education institutions do a good job,
that the recent financial troubles have brought about the elimination of most waste and some duplication. It is likely that the system as it stands now produces the best education for the dollars invested, and the state can afford and make use of all its colleges and universities for the benefit of the citizens of the state.

Most of the rumblings about closing colleges has come because of attitudes and views on the campuses of the colleges and universities themselves, in my opinion. I doubt if the Governor or the media would consider asking for such a commission if greater statesmanship and generosity toward one another had prevailed amongst the institutions themselves. The Governor has said that talk about closing colleges should be set aside. He is wise to do that. The issue will be raised, but I believe the more important issue will be which institution should do what. We do not know what information the commission will require from us, but I want us to be well prepared to present Grand Valley as it really is. Further, I want us to explain clearly what we do, why we do it, and the role we see for ourselves in the future. Within the week I will appoint a group to begin working on our presentation. The Provost will be in consultation
with the Senate and the Divisions as we make our plans to cooperate with the commission.

I have not exhausted all my thoughts and ideas. For now, however, I have taken enough of your time, and appreciated the opportunity to present some of my major interests to you. I will welcome your suggestions and any admonitions you may want to express. As many of you know, I gain from the personal dialogue I have with you, and look forward to more of that in the coming months.

As you know, I have an optimistic streak in me. I hope it is not Panglossian. To some degree we make life into what we perceive it to be. I feel good about what we have done the last few years. That is why I am optimistic about the coming two semesters. My satisfaction does not come from the dismantling that was done. There are some of you who are happier about that. I believe that we made the best decisions for the institution when confronted from outside by complex and difficult forces. Because we made good decisions, we are in the best position to cope with the next “slings and arrows.”
The regret that lives with me and is never quite expurgated comes from the sense of injustice or wrongful discrimination that individuals feel because of actions taken by others at the college. I wish there could be perfect justice, perfectly perceived. Our own small as well as large failures keep us from that state. We cannot all be of one mind in such matters. I only hope that when those occasions come, those subjected and feeling wronged have a reservoir of good will that will save them from debilitating bitterness and cynicism.

Having said thus, I convey to all of you once again my gratitude for living another year of life among you. In trying and good times you have had my respect; you comprise an academic community with which I am proud to be associated.
Son,

we are having both the Physical Education and athletic staffs. I hope you and Nancy can attend.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
We trained hard... but it seemed every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganized... I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization.

Robert Edwards